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SUBJECT: UK UPDATE: PANDEMIC FLU PREPAREDNESS

REF: 05 LONDON 8633

1.(U) Summary. HMG's contingency plans for pandemic flu continue to evolve. During the past month HMG floated a new attack rate (the percentage of the population expected to contract the pandemic influenza virus) for contingency planning and circulated draft procedures on a new method for distributing anti-virals. The Department of Health (DH) predicts HMG will be finished planning by mid-2007. Our contacts at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and DH re-affirmed their support for the International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza (IPAPI) but expressed some unease over the role of the EC and the timing of an upcoming meeting in Bamako. End Summary.

2.(U) A "Letter-to-Colleagues" from Lindsey Davis, HMG's National Director of Pandemic Influenza Preparedness, made a splash in the press with its use of a 35% attack rate for a possible pandemic. This compares with a 25% assumed attack rate found in the UK's pandemic contingency plan (see Reftel) released in October 2005. When pressed on the difference our DH contact stated there had always been a range of attack rates considered in the original contingency plans.

3.(U) Davis's letter also raised for discussion among health care providers a new method for distributing anti-virals to sick patients (Note. DH will finish procuring 14.6 million doses of the anti-virals, enough to cover 25% of the population, by the end of September 2006 End Note.) The proposed new method calls for the establishment of a national flu hotline which would feed calls to local flu call centers. At the call centers workers will use a flow chart to determine if a patient needs the anti-virals or if the patient needs to come to a health center. If the patient can remain at home and needs anti-viral treatment the call workers will ask the patient to designate a friend or relative to go to an anti-viral depot to pick up the medicine.

4.(U) Our contacts at DH predicted HMG would finish the contingency planning for pandemic influenza by mid-2007. At that point the plan would enter a "maintenance" stage. They also told us they plan to run an exercise named "Winter Willow" in January or February 2007 to test their contingency plans.

5.(SBU) While overall very supportive of IPAPI our contacts did express some concerns. They mentioned the EC's desire for a separate place on the core group as a problem area. Our DH contact stated the Friends of the Presidency meeting on pandemic influenza which will take place on September 26 in Brussels should lay some of the concerns in this area to rest. Our DH contact also expressed concern about a possible

scheduling conflict between the December IPAPI meeting in Bamako and a Global Health Security Group in Japan at the same time.

6.(U) Comment. HMG's planning on pandemic influenza is now progressing from top level programs to specific contingency plans for local areas. HMG continues to be engaged positively on IPAPI and is appreciative of the information it gains from contacts with HHS and CDC. While there some misgivings over the composition and meeting schedule of IPAPI those concerns do not appear to seriously affect the commitment of HMG to the overall effort. End Comment.

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